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Proposed Bill No. 198: An Act Concerning Riverview Hospital
Connecticut General Assembly Select Committee on Children
February 8, 2011

Good afternoon Honorable Members of the Select Committee on Children. My name is Loretta Jay and I live in Fairfield. I thank you for this opportunity to provide comment regarding *An Act Concerning Riverview Hospital*.

I am opposed to the proposed closing of Riverview Hospital. I come to this opinion through various professional and life experiences. I run a consulting organization with the mission to promote emotionally healthy and safe children. I am a former DCF social worker and supervisor and have a lot of experience securing appropriate psychiatric placement for children. And, I am the parent of a child with behavioral health needs. Connecticut must lower its expenditures, but this cannot occur at the expense of our most vulnerable: children who are severely mentally ill.

Riverview Hospital is not an expendable state service and its programs cannot be adequately privatized to save money. This facility is the only choice for severely emotionally disturbed children who are rejected by private hospitals. It is the only choice for children with chronic mental health needs whose insurance has been exhausted. It is, sadly, the only place that some children can call home: revolving in and out of private psychiatric hospitals and residential facilities, Riverview takes these children back when others will not.

What hospital will take the child who starts fires? What about the child who kills or tortures animals? Who will take the child who physically or sexually assaults others? Or, the child who is repeatedly discharged prematurely because the family's medical insurance has run out?

The legislature cannot mandate privately managed children's psychiatric facilities to treat these children if the facility's medical team determines that they are not equipped to safely treat the specific behavior. Without Riverview, these children will be forced to find hospitalization in out-of state facilities.

At a time when 367 of Connecticut's children are already placed in out-of-state residential facilities, why would we consider closing the only fail-safe psychiatric facility for children that the state has? We know that it is more expensive for children to be placed out of state; isolating for the child and reunification more challenging; and financially and emotionally problematic for families. For children that are DCF involved it is time-consuming and costly for staff. An article that ran on January 16, 2011 in the *Hartford Courant* summarized the disparity between the type of residential programming needed for Connecticut's children and youth, and the programs that are available. Closing Riverview Hospital will exacerbate this problem by impacting the children in need of psychiatric placement, in addition to those needing residential placement.

Contrary to the proposed bill before you, I respectfully urge you to consider growth and enhancement of services for children with behavioral health needs. The outlay at the onset will yield cost savings in the long run.

Respectfully Submitted,

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